

# UPDATE

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## **Prevention: Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)**

The best defense against spreading MRSA is to practice good hygiene, as follows:

- Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water. Scrub them briskly for at least 15 seconds, then dry them with a disposable towel and use another towel to turn off the faucet. When you don't have access to soap and water, carry a small bottle of hand sanitizer containing at least 62 percent alcohol.
- Always shower promptly after exercising.
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed. Keep wounds that are draining or have pus, covered with clean, dry bandages. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions on proper care of the wound. Pus from infected wounds can contain *S. aureus* and MRSA, so keeping the infection covered will help prevent the spread to others. Bandages or tape can be discarded with regular trash.
- Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages.
- Avoid sharing personal items, such as towels, washcloths, razors, clothes, or uniforms.
- Wash sheets, towels, and clothes that become soiled with water and laundry detergent; use bleach and hot water if possible. Drying clothes in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, also helps kill bacteria in clothes.

Tell any healthcare providers who treat you if you have or had an *S. aureus* or MRSA skin infection. If you have a skin infection that requires treatment, ask your healthcare provider if you should be tested for MRSA. Many healthcare providers prescribe drugs that are not effective against antibiotic-resistant staph, which delays treatment and creates more resistant germs.

Healthcare providers can treat many *S. aureus* skin infections by draining the abscess or boil and may not need to use antibiotics. Draining of skin boils or abscesses should only be done by a healthcare provider. For mild to moderate skin infections, incision and drainage by a healthcare provider is the first-line treatment. Before prescribing antibiotics, your provider will consider the potential for antibiotic resistance. Thus, if MRSA is suspected, your provider will avoid treating you with beta-lactam antibiotics, a class of antibiotic observed not to be effective in killing the staph bacteria. For severe infection, doctors will typically use vancomycin intravenously.

Healthcare providers are fighting back against MRSA infection by tracking bacterial outbreaks and by investing in products, such as antibiotic-coated catheters and gloves that release disinfectants. Practicing good personal hygiene is recommended as the first line of defense to prevent viruses from spreading person-to-person.

